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ABSTRACT

Derived from the Greek "andros" (male) and "gyne" (female), the word "androgyny" etymologically embodies the two sexes reconciled in one. This paper examines the concept of androgyny and points out the advantages of an androgynous language that expands and diversifies the possibilities of human thought and behavior, instead of limiting and reducing them as does sexist language. The paper discusses the following topics: the roots of the concept of androgyny; attempts by present-day authors to create androgynous language patterns; the concept of androgyny as treated in recent literature; some differences between nonsexist language and androgynous semantics; androgyny as an emerging metaphor in theories of personality development; the implications of androgynous ethics in business and politics; and the potential of a society of androgynous people for achieving human reconciliation and survival. (GW)

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DOUBLE STANDARD/DOUBLESPEAK: THE LANGUAGE OF SEXISM

Toward an Androgynous Language

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In the beginning heaven and earth were one as were light and darkness and male and female. But consciousness split from Being and in a naming of parts divided the universe into neatly defined categories. Polarities replaced unities. Woman was divided from Man and their characteristics named in opposition to each other. Man separated the day from night and identified himself with the greater light of the day and woman with the lesser light of the night. Each ruled "his" own domain in opposition to the other. When Woman decided to be included as neither lesser nor greater than "he," she defined herself, then directed her pole toward their reconciliation in androgyny.

I've begun with a mythical history of creation to not only provide a context for the concept of androgyny but also to contrast its holistic connotations with the divisive, polarizing tendencies of sexism. In re-creating a myth, I have, along with many others, given new definition to an old idea without disassociating it from its source. And, this is exactly what I'll be

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doing throughout this paper by first saying something about the roots of androgyny and its present contexts, and secondly, by examining the semantics and grammar of androgyny. In the process, I intend to connect the language with the assumptions and implications of androgynous symbols in organizing our perceptions, values, ways of thinking and being.

Derived from the Greek andros (male) and gynē (female), the word "androgyny," etymologically embodies the two sexes reconciled in one, and as such, suggests more than the sum of a stereotyped masculinity and femininity. Unlike hermaphrodites whose anatomy and physiology are of both sexes, the androgyne is physiologically either male or female, but not both. Nor is androgyny the same as bisexuality which is concerned with a person's sexual attractions to people of both sexes. Androgyny, on the other hand, emphasizes the intrapersonal dialogue in the psychic-sexual development of the individual and is as applicable to homosexuals as it is to heterosexuals. The modern androgyne is anatomically either a male or female who consciously accepts the dialogue between the masculine and feminine aspects of their individual psyches. Nevertheless, the androgyne remains as difficult to define as the process of individuation and self-actualization since it is unique for each person.

To even talk of androgyny and an androgynous language is to pose a paradox and contradiction in terms. Language, with its invariable fragmentation of experience into parts and wholes, subjects and objects, and masculine and feminine, creates illusory boundaries that measure and divide the phenomenal world into polar opposites that tend to reduce perceived options to

either/or extremes. Written language, especially, suggests linear structures and stratified hierarchies with clearly defined boundaries. Since the concept of androgyny suggests holistic processes and self-integration, it might be better represented by a non-verbal image like Yin/Yang where the two are one, share aspects of each other, neither of which is superior, and are arranged in fluid, potentially changing lines.

Nevertheless, we still have to rely on the conventional definitions of "masculine" and "feminine" to discuss androgyny since we do not yet have the vocabulary to describe someone who is sensitive and assertive, rational and emotional or gentle and strong, except in possible oxymorons, "masculinely feminine" and "femininely masculine," and in the concept of androgyny itself.

In acknowledging differences in biological sex, androgyny doesn't homogenize identity into sameness or unisex, but opens a range of behavior more diverse for each person than adherence to "masculine" and "feminine" standards of uniformity. A man could be meditative and gentle and a woman, intellectual and tough, without committing patriarchal thoughtcrimes. Androgyny suggests that each person express the diversity that is uniquely theirs instead of rushing into psychotheraphy to remedy sex role stuttering or behavior unbecoming the stereotype. By definition, the androgyne cannot be stereotyped; androgyny is the process of "unbecoming" the stereotype and becoming an authentic integrated person.

The word "androgyny" also seems preferable to the term "nonsexist" since the latter implies sexual neutrality in de-emphasizing sexual identity; whereas androgyny recognizes biological

sex without making it completely deterministic. As a negative word, "nonsexist," suggests what stereotyped language and behavior aren't, but, as a metaphor, I don't think it provides the energy to generate a concept of human liberation with roots in the past and growth and adaptability for the future.

The roots of androgyny, on the other hand, are found not only in Greek myth and metaphor, but in biological and psychological processes, the most primitive universal language "spoken" by sperm and egg at conception. The androgyne is a symbolic reminder that whatever our sex, our origins are invariably female and male. The fertilized egg, like Yin/Yang, is the most basic level of androgynous language and dialogue and continues with the growth of our psychic-physical self. As an adrogynous entity, we are born as more than and different from the sum of our parental parts, yet participating in both. We now talk of an androgynous brain where the left and right hemispheres, correlated with "masculine" analytical ability and "feminine" intuition respectively, confirm the continuity of biological androgyny in the left-right dialogue of the brain's thinking and language making processes.

The androgynous biological dialogue can also be recognized in the creation myth of Genesis I:27, "So God created man in his own image...; male and female created he <u>them</u> (italics added) as well as in the language of writers and poets who recognized in androgyny their creative process. In <u>A Room of One's Own</u>, Virginia Woolf muses that

> If one is a man, still the woman part of the brain must have effect; and a woman also must have intercourse with the man in her. Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous. It is when this

> fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties. Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine,...[1]

More recently, Mary Daly, philosopher and theologian, postulated that the struggle for self-transformation and spiritual rebirth begins with the breaking of patriarchal idols and stereotypes. The iconoclast, however, must have the courage to stand alone and heal the divided self before launching a campaign for human liberation.

Although Daly's vision of human liberation is not new, her language creates what she calls "the method" of evolving spiritual consciousness of women: a reclaiming of the right to name the self, the world and God -- in effect, to be reborn in conscious androgynous dialogue.

As philosopher and poet, she creates androgynous metaphors and contexts from old words in new juxtapositions that jar and shatter patriarchal assumptions and liberate language and consciousness from sexist semantics. For example, she talks of the "sisterhood of man" to lend generic weight to "sisterhood" while emasculating the pseudogeneric "man". The expression reminds us of a sexually oppressive world and it signals the possibility of a psychic revolution moving toward androgynous beings in an androgynous society.

Her "method," i.e., her language, involves the "castrating of language and images that reflect and perpetuate the structures of a sexist world."[2] Instead of patriarchy, matriarchy or hierarchy, she rejuvenates the word "diarchy" as a metaphor for androgynous politics, emphasizing participation and reciprocity

instead of alienation and dominance. Neither woman's role reversal with man nor woman's vengeance contribute to androgynous consciousness since both maintain the concepts, images and methods of patriarchy without involving and affirming the feminine qualities of sharing, intuition, feeling and sensitivity. If anything, role reversal and vengeance are a direct denial of the feminine aspect.

For Daly, the androgynous process is first an intrapersonal dialogue and then interpersonal. The feminine principles must be acknowledged and energized in the depths of each male and female's ontological self-affirmation before we can rush to human liberation and reconciliation. It is exactly this consciousness symbolized in the languages we devise and not our physical characteristics that will ultimately define us.

The potential of the metaphor to transform human consciousness has also been reflected in recent literature. In Ursula LeGuin's novel, The Left Hand of Darkness, for example, her earthborn male narrator's perceptions of the androgynous humanity, the Gethenians, are bound by the limits of his androcentric point of view:

> Though I had been nearly two years on Winter, I was still far from being able to see the people of the planet through their own eyes. I tried to, but my efforts took the form of self-consciously seeing a Gethenian first as a man, then as a woman, forcing him into those categories so irrelevant to his nature and so essential to my own.[3]

LeGuin invents worlds and words to force the narrator to perceive beyond the sexism of earth language, but he remarks that the very use of the pronoun "he" in his thoughts leads him to forget that the alien he is with is not a man, but a "manwoman".

In effect, the narrator is hampered by his sexist language as well as the lack of androgynous language and consciousness in understanding the people he is visiting.

The androgyne is still alien, but identified in explicit terms in Adrienne Rich's poem, "The Stranger":

> I am the androgyne
> I am the living mind you fail to describe
> in your dead language
> the lost noun, the verb surviving
> only in the infinitive
> the letters of my name are written under the lids
> of the newborn child.[4]

Her identity, as androgyne, is strange, alive with promise, but as yet undefined and, thankfully, unstereotyped.

For Anne Sexton, androgynous rebirth is implicitly experienced in a mystical dream vision, described after the line, "But I was tired of the gender of things" in her poem, "Consorting with Angels":

> and I lost my common gender and my final aspect.
> Adam was on the left of me
> and Eve was on the right of me,
> both thoroughly inconsistent with the world of reason
> We wove our arms together
> and rode under the sun.
> I was not a woman anymore,
> not one thing or the other.[5]

In addition to fiction and poetry, diaries and journals have been a medium of self-integration and androgynous consciousness. In the uncensored privacy of the personal diary, writers record their intrapersonal dialogues. In 1934, an English psychologist, writing under the pseudonym of Joanna Field, published A Life of One's Own based on the self-analysis in her diary. Like Woolf, who had published A Room of One's Own five years before, Field described her problems and behavior in terms of

her "psychic bisexuality" which she described as "the conflict between my ideas of the male and female attitudes which prevented me from reaching the fullness of either."[6]

A similar conflict exists in Bertolt Brecht's play The Good Woman of Setzuan. Shen-Te is too good when she appears as her feminine self-sacrificing, naively, generous self. Her goodness nearly destroys her until she adopts the masculine persona of a fictitious cousin. When dressed as Shui-Ta, her male alter-ego, the good woman behaves with strength and fairness. By the end of the play, she has recognized the need for the characteristics of both in her. It is the male gods, however, who refuse to change their rules and the world when confronted with the divided female/male self of Shen-Te/Shui-Ta. Shen-Te's last plea to the gods is to be reconciled with her male cousin at least once a week. When she is refused, her last cry is for help. The "good woman" cannot survive conforming to the feminine stereotype nor in unsexing herself in complete role reversal.

In declining the sexist language of "He is a he-man," we can generate an androgynous grammar by relying on forms that already exist in English: "He is a she-man, She is a he-woman," and even better, "They are strong." Such a grammar would imply both genders in usage by opting for plural forms whenever appropriate.

In finally accepting what has been common usage for over four hundred years, the writers of the "NCTE Guidelines for Nonsexist Use of Language" (included in our book Sexism and Language) recommend that plural pronouns be used even though the antecedent is a singular indefinite pronoun like "everybody,

everyone or anybody." We English teachers used to insist that the pseudogeneric forms of "he" had to be used to agree with the antecedent in gender and number in sentences like, "Everyone found his money." Now, "Everyone found their money" is an acceptable standard and implies either or both genders in an androgynous grammar. Using plural nouns when general cases are referred to applies a similar principle, as in "The writers sent their manuscripts and the teachers were given their assignments."

Otherwise, they recommend alternating singular gender pronouns in the same context as in: "Let each student participate. Has she had a chance to talk? Could he fell left out?" as well as the awkward: "A student who was satisfied with her or his performance on the pretest took the posttest." The last sentence maintains what Mary Daly would call "either/or space" and as such illustrates a distinction between nonsexist language and androgynous semantics.

Androgynous people are more likely to use pronouns of solidarity instead of power. In participating with "other" instead of dominating or polarizing "other," such statements as, "we are pregnant" will become more familiar. In effect, androgynous grammar and semantics has less to do with gender rules than with thinking and speaking in new metaphors reconciling the sexes.

Androgynous language is characterized by portmanteau words and neologisms that call our attention to existing sexist patterns as in Varda One's "Manglish" as well as androgynous potentials, as in Mary Daly's portmanteau "cosmosis," a synthesis of "cosmic" and "osmosis":

> The adequate "cosmosis" will require a breakdown of walls within the male psyche as well as within the female. It will require in men as well as in women a desire to become androgynous; that is to become themselves.[7]

Juli Loesch, in defining "testeria," for example, as "the condition of having puny, inadequate emotional responses" reminds us in sound and meaning that "masculine" superrationality is as much a limitation as the "feminine" hysteria. According to Loesch, hysterical women

> who are accustomed to feeling helpless and even physically sick when a crisis hits, can't effectively oppose a tight-lipped testerical male bent on pushing his penisolent way into the world.[8]

Like Russell Baker's "nopersonclature," however, androgynous semantics will invite ridiculous plays on its word play, as with androgynous composers Betty Comden and Adolph Green, who sing in "Simplified Language," "it won't be long before we'll have just one word for both female and male sex organs -- the penina."[9]

An androgyny of theologians, artists and scientists are recognizing the implications of the metaphor as a new way of being and thinking. Judith Bardwick, writes of the implications of "Androgyny and Humanistic Goals" by questioning the assumptions and the methods of science which have traditionally "deified a mode of analyzing, thinking and perceiving" that divided reason from feeling. Like Mary Daly, who calls for iconclastic questioning of "Methodolatry," Bardwick suggests that humanistic, androgynous goals emphasize the "whole of the experience instead of the measurable parts."[10]

As one might expect, androgyny is an emerging metaphor in theories of personality development. Psychologists Mary Sue Richardson and Judith Landon Alpert conclude that unisex, which

is still preoccupied with gender identity is too simplistic a model for change; whereas androgyny, by emphasizing the whole person, recognizes "clear distinctions between the male and female sex based on biological and reproductive capacities" while helping children incorporate what they call "expressive and instrumental" qualities.[11] Thus, in an androgynous psychology, biological sex is part of personality development, but not the sole determinant. If transsexuals had been raised in an androgynous society, I wonder if they would have felt as great a need to surgically match their bodies to their identification with a stereotype.

In education, androgyny implies inter- and transdisciplinary thinking, that is, not only connecting several systems of knowledge, but also thinking intuitively, affectively and meditatively as well as rationally and analytically. We've had many metaphors in the past for holistic education from progressive, humanistic, subversive and confluent, but I don't think they were as free of the implicit sexism their theories and practices were often based on.

The implications for androgynous ethics in business and politics are also promising. The androgynous team of Suzanne H. Cook and Jack L. Mendleson co-authored an article, "Androgynous Management: Key to Social Responsibility?" that pointed out how placing women in key executive positions in an androgynous management would stimulate innovative-mindedness by encouraging diversity and differences as well as expand the range of corporate values to human and social needs in a greater sense of social responsibility.[12]

Many writers have pointed out that the language of patriarchy has distorted our response to nature, ourselves and reality to such an extent that we are depleting our natural resources, polluting the air, earth and water and building the most destructive arsenal in human history. I do not mean to suggest that the androgyne is the new messiah. At best, androgynous people achieve wonders in reconciling themselves.

By extension, however, a society of androgynous beings in intra- and interpersonal I/Thou dialogue is a promising metaphor for reconciliation and survival since an ethics of androgyny are implicit in just such a dialogue. Once the "other" is accepted as the Self and no longer objectified as an "it"/thing or dominated as an inferior, there is less likelihood of enslaving, persecuting or omitting the part of the "I" perceived in "Thou".

An image of androgyny is not a static ideal absorbing the traits of masculinity and femininity in equal amounts, but a re-creation of human traits in a wide range of expressions. Assertiveness need not be gender linked nor recognized as only one kind of behavior. We may begin to recognize assertiveness as a quiet strength as well as a moving force. Unlike Newspeak, 1984, an androgynous language expands and diversifies the possibilities of human thought and behavior instead of limiting and reducing them. Instead of omitting, which is the tendency of doublespeak sexist semantics, androgyny includes and expands.

Although androgynous beings have been around a long time, no one has talked about affirmative action for them. Without

the prominence of the word, the concept and the consciousness in an androgynous language, however, androgynous beings remain the last invisible minority.

NOTES

[1] Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1927), p. 102.

[2] Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), p. 9.

[3] Ursula K. LeGuin, The Left Hand of Darkness (New York: Ace Books, 1969), p. 17.

[4] Adrienne Rich, "The Stranger," in Adrienne Rich's Poetry, eds. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Albert Gelpi (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1975), p. 65.

[5] Anne Sexton, "Consorting with Angels," in No More Masks! eds., Florence Howe and Ellen Bass (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1973), p. 190.

[6] Joanna Field, A Life of One's Own quoted in Revelations: Diaries of Women, eds., Mary Jane Moffat and Charlotte Painter, (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), p. 395.

[7] Daly, p. 172.

[8] Juli Loesch, "Testeria and Penisolence -- A Scourge to Humankind," Aphra: The Feminist Literary Magazine, 4, No. 1 (Winter 1972-73), 43-45.

[9] "Swell Party," Newsweek, Feb. 21, 1977, p. 57.

[10] Judith M. Bardwick, "Androgyny and Humanistic Goals or Goodbye, Cardboard People," in The American Woman: Who Will She Be?, eds. Mary Louise McBee and Kathryn A. Blake, (Beverly Hills: Glencoe Press, 1974), p. 63.

[11] Mary Sue Richardson and Judith Landon Alpert, "Unisex vs. Androgyny," New York University Education Quarterly (Summer 1977), 32.

[12] Suzanne H. Cook and Jack L. Mendleson, "Androgynous Management: Key to Social Responsibility?" Advanced Management Journal, 42, No. 1 (Winter 1977), 25-35.

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